

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Commerce to contract with the National Academy of Sciences to establish the Coordinated Oceanographic Program Advisory Panel to report to the Congress on the feasibility and social value of a coordinated oceanography program.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the 'Exploration of the Seas Act'.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

- (1) During the past 100 years, scientists working with marine fossils, both underwater and high in the mountains, have traced the origins of life on Earth to the sea , beginning approximately 3 billion years ago. Today, life on our planet remains dependent on the vitality of the sea.
- (2) More than two-thirds of the Earth's surface is covered by water, with oceans and inland seas accounting for almost 140 million square miles.
- (3) The United Nations forecasts a worldwide population of 8.9 billion by the year 2050, a 50 percent increase from 5.9 billion in 1999. As this trend in population growth continues, increasing demands will be placed on ocean and coastal resources, not only as a result of population growth in coastal regions, but also from the need to harvest increasing amounts of marine life as a source of food to satisfy world protein requirements, and from the mining of energy-producing materials from offshore resource deposits.
- (4) The ocean remains one of the Earth's last unexplored frontiers. It has stirred our imaginations over the millennia, led to the discovery of new lands, immense mineral deposits, and reservoirs of resources, and produced startling scientific findings.
- (5) The seas possess enormous economic and environmental importance. Some ocean resources, such as fisheries and minerals, are well recognized. Oil use has increased dramatically in recent times, and the sea bed holds large deposits of largely undiscovered reserves. Other ocean resources offer promise for the future. In addition to fossil fuels, the ocean floor contains deposits of gravel, sand, manganese crusts and nodules, tin, gold, and diamonds. Marine mineral resources are extensive, yet poorly understood.

- (6) The oceans also offer rich untapped potential for medications. Marine plants and animals possess inestimable potential in the treatment of human illnesses. Coral reefs, sometimes described as the rain forests of the sea , contain uncommon chemicals that may be used to fight diseases for which scientists have not yet found a cure, such as cancer, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), and diabetes. While the number of new chemical compounds that can be derived from land based plants and microbial fermentation is limited, scientists have only just begun to explore the sea's vast molecular potential.
- (7) In spite of the development of new technologies, comparatively little of the ocean has been studied. The leadership role of the United States has been eroded by a gradual decrease in funding support, even while public opinion surveys indicate that ocean exploration is at least as important as space exploration .
- (8) The National Academy of Sciences has the means by which to study and make determinations regarding the adoption and establishment of a coordinated oceanography program for the exploration of the seas, in which the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration could participate in a role similar to that of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration with regard to the International Space Station.

SEC. 3. COORDINATED OCEANOGRAPHIC PROGRAM ADVISORY PANEL.

- (a) IN GENERAL- Not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act and subject to the availability of appropriations, the Secretary of Commerce shall contract with the National Academy of Sciences to establish the Coordinated Oceanography Program Advisory Panel (in this Act referred to as the 'Panel'), comprised of experts in ocean studies, including individuals with academic experience in oceanography, marine biology, marine geology, ichthyology, and ocean related economics.
- (b) CHAIRPERSON AND VICE CHAIRPERSON- The Panel shall elect a chairperson and a vice-chairperson.
- (c) TERMINATION- The Panel shall cease to exist 30 days after submitting its final report and recommendations pursuant to section 4.

SEC. 4. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

- (a) IN GENERAL- No later than 18 months after its establishment the Panel shall report to the Committee on Resources of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate on the feasibility and social value of a coordinated oceanography program. In preparing its report, the Panel shall examine existing oceanographic efforts and the level of coordination or cooperation between and among participating countries and institutions.

- (b) INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP- To assist in making its feasibility determination under subsection (a), the Panel shall convene an international workshop with participation from interested nations and a broad range of persons representing scientists, engineers, policy makers, regulators, industry, and other interested parties.
- (c) FINAL REPORT- The Panel shall include in its final report--
 - (1) an identification of countries and organizations that would be likely to participate in a coordinated program;
 - (2) a description of those areas of study in which national or international oceanographic cooperation is currently being undertaken; and
 - (3) an identification of areas of study in which knowledge of the oceans is inadequate.
- (d) IMPLEMENTATION- If the Panel determines that a coordinated oceanography program is feasible and has significant value towards advancing mankind's knowledge of the ocean, the Panel shall include in its final report recommendations for implementing such program, including recommendations regarding--
 - (1) the institutional arrangements, treaties, or laws necessary to implement a coordinated oceanography program;
 - (2) the methods and incentives needed to secure cooperation and commitments from participating nations to ensure that the benefit that each nation that is a party to any international agreement establishing a coordinated oceanography program receives is contingent upon meeting the nation's obligations (financial or otherwise) under such an agreement;
 - (3) the costs associated with establishing a coordinated program; and
 - (4) the types of undersea vehicles, ships, observing systems, or other equipment that would be necessary to operate a coordinated program.

SEC. 5. OBTAINING DATA.

Subject to National security restrictions, the Panel may obtain from any department or agency of the United States information necessary to enable it to carry out this Act. Upon request of the chairperson of the Panel, the head of any department or agency shall furnish that information at no cost to the Panel.

SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated for the purposes of carrying out this Act, and to be made available until such sums are expended, \$1,500,000.